

**Reinventing a Chinese American
Women's Tradition in Gish Jen's
*Mona in the Promised Land***

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Abstract

This paper places Gish Jen's *Mona in the Promised Land* within the context of Chinese American women's fictional texts and examines the ways in which Jen playfully reinvents a Chinese American women's tradition. With an inclusion of a mother-daughter plot in the novel, Jen dutifully constructs a vertical (generational) relationship, which is one of the typical thematics of Chinese American women's writing. Yet Jen also inventively creates a horizontal community for her protagonist Mona, in which racial, class, and gender boundaries are deliberately overlooked. The dissolution of such a utopian hybrid community nevertheless questions the possibility of this kind of solidarity. Moreover, through the multiple "switches" of identity of her characters, Jen undermines the essentialist fixture of racial authenticity and the politics of insiderism. Finally, with the reconciliation between Mona and her mother and the birth of Mona's Jewish-Chinese American daughter, I argue that Jen is consciously (re-)inventing a comic tradition for Chinese American women's writing through which she may at once acknowledge the importance of matrilineage and introduce a politics of relationality that goes beyond racial confines.

Key Words: Chinese American literature, women's literary tradition,

politics of relationality, Gish Jen, *Mona in the Promised Land*